UNITED
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Secretariat

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INFORMATION CIRCULAR

To: Members of the staff at Headquarters
Members of permanent missions to the United Nations

From: The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management

Subject: LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS TRAINING - 1996

1. Effective communication among staff from different linguistic backgrounds is fundamental to carrying out the work of the Organization. Language training courses in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish are organized in order to promote linguistic balance within the Secretariat and to improve the language capabilities of its staff as mandated by General Assembly resolutions 2480 B (XXIII) of 21 December 1968, 43/224 D of 21 December 1988 and 50/11 of 2 November 1995. The purpose of these courses is to provide staff members with the opportunity to learn and use in their work the official languages of the Organization, bearing in mind their needs and their office hours. As stated in information circular ST/IC/1995/73 of 8 November 1995, staff members are encouraged to make use of the language training facilities available to them. Written and oral communication skills courses, such as drafting and presentation skills, enhance staff members' abilities to perform their jobs with greater competence.

I. ELIGIBILITY

2. (a) All staff members who have appointments for at least six months beyond the deadline of the registration period for the term in question or who have the expectancy of continued employment, as certified by their Executive Office, may register for language courses. A staff member's application to start or continue studies of a language must have the endorsement of the staff member's immediate supervisor before it is submitted for registration. Priority for admission is given to staff members; members of permanent missions to the United Nations will be admitted as space permits. Applications from consultants, staff of non-governmental organizations, press correspondents accredited to the United Nations and staff of other organizations of the common system will be considered in the light of available resources (see para. 8 below for information on fees);

(b) Consular staff, spouses and children are not admitted to United Nations language courses.

II. 1996 COURSE CALENDAR

3. The 1996 course calendar is as follows:

(a) January 1996 term

Language classes:	2 January-22 March
End-of-term examinations:	25-29 March

(b) April 1996 term

Language classes:	15 April-5 July
End-of-term examinations:	8-12 July

(c) September 1996 term

Language classes:	16 September-6 December
End-of-term examinations:	9-13 December

III. REGISTRATION

Registration schedule

4. The registration schedule for language and communications courses is as follows:

(a) Registration for January 1996 term

30 October-10 November 1995

(b) Registration for April 1996 term

26 February-8 March 1996

(c) Registration for September 1996 term

3-14 June 1996

2-6 September 1996

Registration procedure

5. (a) New participants may register for a language course by filling out a registration form, which may be obtained from the Language and Communications Skills Training Programme, room S-606, during the established registration period between 1 and 3 p.m. and returning it to the same room before the published deadline. Those who have some prior knowledge of the language they wish to study must make an appointment for a placement test when they register;

(b) Once registered in a language course, participants will be given an opportunity in class before the end-of-term examination to renew their registration for regular courses in subsequent terms. Participants who fail to reregister at that time will be dropped from the programme unless they have submitted a written explanation of their special circumstances to the appropriate language coordinator;

(c) All those who wish to participate in conversation classes or special courses, such as the advanced reading workshops, the pronunciation workshops or communication skills courses must fill out the appropriate registration form, which may be obtained in room S-606 during the registration period;

(d) Returning participants who have been absent from a course of study for two terms or more will be required to take a placement test in order to re-enrol in the programme.

Language of study

6. Prospective participants should exercise particular care in choosing the language in which they wish to take either a regular or an accelerated course, for they may register for only one such course each term and may not interrupt a course of study in one language in order to begin studying another without the authorization of the Training Service. Students in the programme must write to the Training Officer in charge of Language Training to request such a change.

Notification of enrolment

7. Staff members and other participants whose registration is current or who have registered within the established registration period should check the class lists, which will be posted on the sixth floor of the Secretariat building in the SA-B classroom area and on the second floor of UNDC-2 building during the week before the beginning of each term.

Tuition fees

8. (a) Members of the United Nations Secretariat, staff of other organizations of the common system and accredited (diplomatic) staff are admitted to regular and accelerated language courses free of charge. Tuition fees of $350 per term for each regular and accelerated course are payable by non-staff members as referred to in paragraph 2 (a) above. In accordance with section XVII of General Assembly resolution 36/235 of 18 December 1981, accredited (diplomatic) staff of permanent missions at Headquarters may enrol free of charge in regular and accelerated language courses during the established registration periods. All other staff of permanent missions

(administrative, technical and service) will be charged the standard fee of $350. No tuition fees will be refunded after the second week of classes;

(b) Tuition fees of $200 per term for two-hour per week courses, and $100 for all one-hour per week special language courses, such as reading workshops in Russian, Chinese and Arabic, etc. are payable by non-staff members as referred to in paragraph 2 (a) above;

(c) Staff of the United Nations Secretariat and staff of other organizations of the common system who repeat a regular or accelerated course at any level will be charged a repeater fee of $100. However, the repeater fee will not be charged if they need to repeat the course as a result of absences of three weeks or more attributable either to certified sick leave or to a mission assignment of which they were unaware at the time they enrolled in the course. Participants who have been assigned to mission service must provide written notification from their executive/administrative officer or, in the case of mission personnel, their supervisor, giving the particulars of the dates and duration of the assignment.

Cancellation of registration

9. Participants who believe that they will be unable to complete the course in which they are enrolled and wish to withdraw must do so by completing the change-of-registration form in room S-606 between 1 and 3 p.m. within the first two weeks of the term. If these students wish to re-register for the same course in a subsequent term, they must come in person to room S-606 during the announced registration period to complete the necessary registration forms. Those paying participants who cancel their registration after this two-week period will be considered participants for the term and will be charged the full fee for each course in which they have registered. No tuition fees will be refunded after the second week of classes. After this period, reimbursement of fees will be granted only if the participants who have withdrawn meet the same criteria as listed in paragraph 8 (c) above.

IV. LANGUAGE TRAINING

10. Four types of language training courses are offered each term: regular, accelerated, conversation and specialized courses. In addition, the Training Service also designs and conducts special job-related language training courses to meet specific language needs at the request of departments.

Regular courses

11. (a) Regular courses meet for one-hour periods, three or four times a week, depending on the level;

(b) Classes are offered at the following times:

Before work: 8.30 a.m.

Lunch hour: 12 p.m.
1 p.m.
2 p.m.

After work: 5.45 p.m. (6.15 p.m. during the General Assembly session)

It should be noted that not all levels of a given language are offered at each of these times. Draft schedules, posted in room S-606, should be consulted at the time of registration. Every effort will be made to place registrants according to the time preferences they indicate; however, because the number of places in lunch-hour courses is limited, there is no guarantee that registrants will be given the time they have chosen.

Accelerated courses

12. Accelerated courses are offered as an intensive alternative to the regular programme. Classes meet five days a week from 8.45 to 9.45 a.m. Written authorization is required for staff members wishing to take such courses. This authorization must be renewed each time the staff member re-registers for an accelerated course.

Conversation courses

13. Conversation courses are provided for staff members who have passed the language proficiency examination or who have a sufficiently advanced knowledge of the language. Those enrolled in the upper four levels of a language programme are also eligible to participate. The purpose of these courses is to develop oral expression and to supplement the instruction provided in the other courses. Conversation classes meet two hours a week.

Special courses

14. Specialized language workshops in a variety of language skill areas are offered; advanced reading, listening and pronunciation skills workshops are available. These workshops allow participants to focus on and improve their abilities in specific skill areas. At the time of registration, participants may check which workshops are available in the language they wish to study.

V. COMMUNICATION SKILLS TRAINING

15. To address the needs of the Organization for staff members to develop their communications skills for job-related purposes, training courses have been developed as part of the management training plan outlined in the report of the Secretary-General on the training programme in the Secretariat (A/C.5/47/9). Courses under this heading are listed in detail in the Staff Development Programme booklet.

16. The writing training component of communications skills training addresses the need to improve the drafting skills of staff members whose functions require them to draft in a working language of the Organization. The writing workshops and eligibility requirements are described below. Writing workshops generally meet from 3 to 5 p.m. one day a week.

Expository writing

17. Expository writing workshops are open to staff members who wish to improve their basic writing skills and who have passed the language proficiency examination in English or have completed the last level of the English programme. They are also open to native English speakers. The workshops emphasize paragraph development, clear topic sentences, cohesion and unity. Staff members must apply during the registration period, obtain written authorization from their supervisors and take a placement examination.

Drafting letters and memoranda (English or French)

18. Drafting letters and memoranda writing workshops in English and French, the working languages of the Secretariat at Headquarters, are available to those staff members whose function requires them to draft letters and memoranda and who have passed the language proficiency examination or are native speakers of the language. The goal of these courses is to develop the participants' abilities to write clearly, concisely and correctly, using the style appropriate to United Nations letters and memoranda. Staff members wishing to take such courses must have written authorization from their supervisors and take a placement examination.

Principles of report writing workshop (English)

19. The principles of report writing workshops cover the format and style recommended for writing reports for the Organization. Emphasis is placed on writing action-oriented reports that present essential information as briefly and clearly as possible. The workshops are open to those whose function requires them to draft reports in English. Along with their application forms, applicants must submit a report they have written recently.

Giving Oral Presentations (English and French)

20. The Giving Oral Presentations workshops offer staff members whose functions include speaking before groups the opportunity to develop their abilities to do so. Participants prepare presentations tailored to the audience and purpose. These presentations are videotaped and participants receive feedback and coaching on their presentations. Those staff members whose function requires them to make oral presentations may take these workshops at the request of their department.

VI. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Self-study and resource centre

21. The Training Service operates a self-study and resource centre (UNDC-2, room 203), consisting of a resource centre and a multi-media laboratory for individual study. The new self-study centre, which is being phased in, will have an increasing array of audio and video materials, and computer software as well as other language training manuals which are geared to facilitate staff members' retention and further development of their acquired linguistic skills for United Nations-related purposes. Some communications skills self-study materials will also be available.

22. The hours during which the self-study and resource centre are open are posted on the bulletin boards on the second floor of the UNDC-2 building and the sixth floor of the Secretariat at the beginning of each term. The self-study centre will also be open before and after working hours so that staff can avail themselves of this resource on their own time.

Lunch-hour attendance of language courses

23. Staff members attending classes during their lunch hour are allowed 20 minutes for a quick meal before resuming their work.

Absenteeism

24. Participants who fail to attend class during the first week of the term will automatically be dropped from the class list and their places may be allotted to persons on the waiting list unless they have informed the language coordinator in writing. Absences from class during the term should be explained in writing to the appropriate language coordinator.

Course materials

25. Participants will be informed on the first day of class of the materials that will be used during the course. It should be noted that course materials produced by the Training Service are intended for use exclusively by participants in the language courses offered by that Service.

End-of-term examinations

26. (a) Examination schedules are posted during the last month of classes. Examinations are an integral part of the teaching programme, and it is mandatory to take them. Participants who do not sit for the end-of-term examination will be dropped from the programme unless they have submitted adequate written explanation to the appropriate coordinator in advance of their absence;

(b) Examinations are given after the last week of classes for regular and accelerated courses to determine whether a participant will pass to a higher level or repeat the course. The examinations consist of written and oral components, both of which must be passed to enable a participant to go on to the next level. Participants who fail a course may arrange to have a general

discussion of the results of their examination by making an appointment with the appropriate language coordinator one week after the beginning of a term;

(c) Participants who are prevented by compelling circumstances from taking the examination as scheduled and who wish to request a make-up examination must write a memorandum to the coordinator of the language they are studying.

Language proficiency examination

27. The United Nations language proficiency examination is the official test of a staff member's knowledge of a language and may be taken both by participants who have completed the last level of a language course and by staff members who have achieved proficiency from outside sources. The language proficiency examination will be given on 28 and 29 May 1996. This examination is the official test of a staff member's knowledge of a language. Application to take this examination must be made separately. Further details will be given in an information circular to be issued in early 1996. There are no make-up examinations for the language proficiency examination.

VII. INQUIRIES

28. The information desk in the Secretariat building, room S-606, is open from 1 to 3 p.m. on weekdays for inquiries.

29. Telephone numbers to call for information:

General information and message machine: 963-7021

Self-study and resource centre: 963-2482

Language proficiency examinations: 963-9503

Pedagogical inquiries and appointments with language coordinators and head teachers:

Arabic: 963-9506

Chinese: 963-2481

English: 963-7027

French: 963-7019 and 963-5153

Russian: 963-7063

Spanish: 963-7026

Information desk: 963-7056

Teachers' room 1B-24: 963-5155

Teachers' room DC-2-201: 963-2480

Staff members who wish to consult a language coordinator or head teacher should telephone in advance to make an appointment.